

## Town Council Honors Gentleman Sweeny

By Sophie Braccini

There was quite a turn out at the Town Council on June 11th to hear a proclamation to honor the memory of Jim Sweeny. The Moraga resident who passed away on May 25th, at age 81, was a former Council Member and Mayor of the Town.

Fellow former Council Members lined up to talk about the man they all respected as a mentor. Sweeny's funeral was a private event, so the homage the Town paid him was an opportunity for some of those who loved and held him in high esteem to convey their admiration and express how much they would miss him.

Sweeny was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia to a working class family with five children. Only he and a brother went to college. A very bright young man, he graduated from law school but rapidly moved into management consulting. He started his career on the East Coast and was promoted Director of the San Francisco office of Towers Perrin Forster and Crosby Management Consultants in 1972.

The family moved to Moraga. After a very successful career, he retired early in the mid eighties because, according to daughter Carol Sweeny-Greco, "He knew he wanted to give back to the community and had the means to do so." A very patriotic man, he was a socially-progressive Republican. He was open-minded on many issues, and had no racial or sexual intolerance. "My mother and he were anything but prejudiced and provincial," said Greco, "they raised my sister, Sue Hilk, and me with fabulous values and we were encouraged to make our own choices."

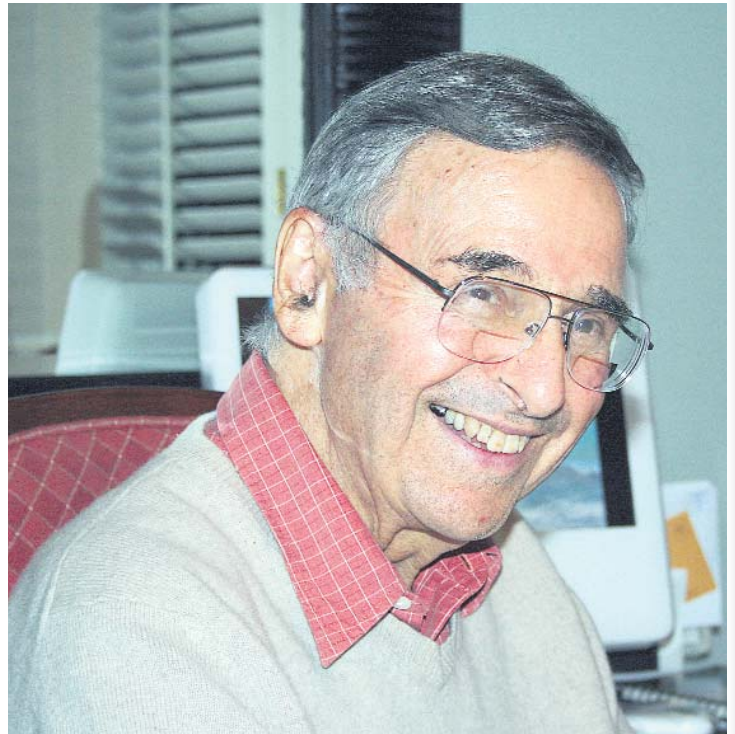
This openness was characteristic of his positions when it came to Town government. He was elected to the Town Council in 1988 and served two terms. "He loved the open space and the wanted to protected the ridgelines," says Sweeny-Greco, "but he understood the business issues, and was seeking reasonable managed growth to maintain the charm and personality of the town." In line with these positions he was involved in implementing the Moraga Open Space Ordinance (MOSO 1986).

Former colleagues were eager to share their admiration of his personality and leadership. "Jim was a true friend," said Al Dessayer, "he had charm and integrity, and his only goal was to make Moraga a beautiful place to live."

Sue Noe Welsh, who served on the Council with Sweeny for six years, said she misses the Southern gentleman, "he was a wonderful mentor."

Many highlighted his leadership style, Mike Majchrzak remembers, "He taught me that true leadership is to allow people to live their passion." Majchrzak highlighted how Sweeny had always emphasized integrity. Rich Avanzino couldn't agree more, "When I ran against him someone suggested personal attacks against me. But Sweeny refused, saying that the campaign was about ideas not people." Avanzino added that Sweeny was one of his heroes.

His grand personality struck Cherie Grant, "Jim was a very generous man, and he made us all feel that the Council was a team, even when we had difference of opinions, it was always about ideas, not about people." As a young Council Member she appreciated that he wouldn't let members of the public make personal attacks. Vice-Mayor David Trotter knew him as



Jim Sweeny in 2006

Photo Carol Sweeny-Greco

a Mayor when he himself was on the Planning Commission, "Jim worked solely for the best interest of the community, he was a gentleman and a gentle man."

His former colleagues all remembered as well his humor, the little twinkle in his eye. "He was a happy person," says daughter Sweeny-Greco, "he had a passion for life and a tireless energy."

His ability to step up to the plate and natural leadership qualities led him to continue to give back after leaving the Council. He was president of Kiwanis, on the board of the Moraga Educational Foundation and the St Mary's Hearst Gallery. He became the director of Sons in Retirement and the Chairman Emeritus for Goodwill Industries for the greater East Bay that provides employment and training to thousands of disadvantages and disabled people.

The last few years of his life were shadowed by ailment. "He retained his graciousness and dignity till the end," says his daughter, "He had a great deal of personal respect, and always treated others, from any walk of life, with dignity."